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LAND PLANNING AIDS WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE

A radio talk by W. A. Rowlands, Assistant State County Agent Leader, Madison, Wisconsin, delivered in the Land-Grant College Radio Program, March 20, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC radio stations.

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Wisconsin has no gold, no oil, no coal. Wisconsin has a rich heritage in productive farm lands, extensive forest lands and ideal recreation lands and waters, and industries based on all three. Wise planning for the best future use of these resources has been one of the most important undertakings which the state has engaged in.

The people of Wisconsin are aware of and awake to the real need for land planning. Idle lands, vanishing property values and stricken communities throughout America bear silent testimony to the price we must pay for the planless exploitation of our basic resources.

The form of the plan which is now shaping the destiny of these land resources is embodied in a principle that is old in the cities, but which is being applied to an entirely new set of conditions in the counties. That principle we call zoning.

Under the County Zoning Law passed by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1929, County Boards of Supervisors are empowered -- "***** to regulate restrict and determine the areas within which agriculture, forestry, and recreation may be conducted *****" Action to establish by law special use districts and to provide suitable regulations for the protection of the property in the several use districts is zoning.

In its older application in cities one of the primary purposes of zoning is to prevent the lowering of property values resulting from uncontrolled development in densely settled areas. In its newer application in rural areas in counties one of the primary purposes of zoning is to prevent increases in government costs resulting from uncontrolled development in sparsely settled areas. In addition, county zoning will prevent the needless waste of both human and financial resources in unwise settlement. It prohibits the settlement of the poor land and directs settlement toward the good land. In both the city and the county, zoning stabilizes land values, and provides a workable method of putting community planning into effect.

In Wisconsin, eighteen counties have enacted county zoning ordinances, and by this process approximately five million acres of land -- much of it tax delinquent, isolated, and non-agricultural -- has been closed to future agricultural settlement. Another group of seven counties is in the process of enacting similar zoning ordinances under which an additional million and a half acres of land will be closed to agricultural use. These twenty-five counties contain almost all the territory in Wisconsin needing the protection of this type of county zoning ordinance.

This new movement was not established over-night. For ten years many state and county agencies have surveyed, mapped and studied the land and
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- 1 -

economic situation throughout the state in order to arrive at a plan that would be of permanent value to Wisconsin lands and to Wisconsin people.

The essential principles involved in county zoning are now considered sound and a proper function of the police power regulations. Local residents, land owners, and county officials feel that these self-imposed restrictions are necessary, reasonable, and in the interests of the public welfare. They realize that it is only through a reasonable control of land use that uneconomic and wasteful forms of development may be prevented.

By officially attaching a destiny to the lands in the several use districts for agriculture, forestry, and recreation, these Wisconsin counties are now in a position to apply special plans for their development.

There are three important lines of action to be taken in Wisconsin following the enactment of such ordinances. The first of these is: The relocation and rehabilitation -- on a completely voluntary basis -- of isolated settlers now living on land too stony, too hilly, too swampy, unfitted for good agricultural use, and where they are also too far from markets, from neighbors, and from schools. Second: The further blocking out of large areas of the isolated non-agricultural tax-delinquent lands, by sale, purchase, or exchange into public forest and public game areas for efficient protection and management. Third: The continued development of the good farm lands in established agricultural communities close to roads, schools, markets and community centers.

Wisconsin's zoning plan for land use will promote the development of only the best land for agriculture. It will preserve and enhance the great recreational values found in its lakes and streams. It will encourage the growing of timber crops, to furnish the raw materials on which permanent industries, permanent employment, and permanent business may be based. These constitute the fundamentals of Wisconsin's balanced plan of land use.